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ABSTRACT

Recent research on argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness has examined the influence of these two predispositions on marital/interspousal violence and cross-cultural communication. The line of inquiry regarding intrafamily violence and aggression is beginning to emerge. R. J. Gelles and M. A. Straus have identified two intraindividual theories, seven social psychological theories, and six sociocultural theories that have been posited to explain intrafamily violence. D. A. Infante has suggested an interactionist model involving personal, situational, and societal conditions that lead to physically aggressive behavior. Further studies have found that verbal aggression is reciprocal among spouses. Additionally, the increasing frequency of intercultural interaction has led to a flurry of research in cross-cultural communication to examine how differences in behaviors between cultures can stimulate misunderstanding. Studies have explored linguistic, interactional, behavioral, and normative differences between cultures (at this point predominately between U.S. and Japanese cultures) that lead to perceived or actual conflict. (Fifty references are attached.) (KEH)

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ARGUMENTATIVENESS AND VERBAL AGGRESSION: THEIR ROLE IN FAMILY VIOLENCE AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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ARGUMENTATIVENESS AND VERBAL AGGRESSION: THEIR ROLE IN FAMILY VIOLENCE AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Predispositions toward communication have been a central focus of theory-building efforts in communication for almost three decades. Predispositions have been found to account for significant variance in both communication behavior and communication-based perceptions (McCroskey & Daly, 1987; Infante, 1987).

The predisposition of argumentativeness has received considerable attention from scholars in communication. Rancer (1990) lists almost seventy journal articles, book chapters, conference papers, and dissertations on argumentativeness and related concepts disseminated since 1981.

Argumentativeness is defined as a generally stable trait which predisposes individuals in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues, and to verbally challenge the positions that others hold on those issues (Infante & Rancer, 1982). Argumentativeness is conceptually and empirically distinct from verbal aggressiveness (Infante, 1988, Infante, 1987; Infante & Rancer, 1982; Infante & Wigley, 1986). In verbal aggression, individuals seek to attack their adversary's self-concept instead of, or in addition to, their position on controversial issues (Infante & Wigley, 1986; Infante, 1988). The most fundamental outcome of verbal aggression is self-concept damage. Verbally aggressive messages are usually delivered in the form of put-down's or insults.

Verbal aggression in the form of a put-down or insult makes a person look "bad." In order to protect him/herself from further attacks, or to "save face," the victim of verbal aggression frequently retaliates. This outcome is especially prevalent when the recipient of the verbal aggression thinks the attack was intentional, unwarranted, or witnessed by someone else (Infante, 1986). Infante (1988) offers four explanations for the development of the verbally aggressive predisposition: psychopathology, disdain, social learning, and an argumentative skill deficiency.

Studies have emerged examining the influence of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in a variety of communication contexts. Research has explored argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in *marital* (Sabourin, Infante, Rudd, & Payne, 1989; Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989; Rancer, Baukus, & Amato, 1987, 1986), *organizational* (Infante & Gorden, 1989, 1987, 1985a, 1985b; Logue, 1987), *political* (Downs, Kaid, & Ragan, 1990) and in *small-group/leadership* contexts (Barbato, 1987; Scheerhorn, 1987; Schultz, 1982). Studies have explored the relationship between argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness and *gender* (Anderson, Schultz, & Courtney-Staley, 1987; Infante, 1985; Infante & Gorden, 1985a; Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984; Infante, Wall, Leap, & Danielson, K., 1984; Rancer & Baukus, 1987; Rancer & Dierks-Stewart, 1985).

Previous research (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) found that self-perceived communication competence is substantially associated with an individual's willingness to communicate and

may be a significant factor in individual's behavioral choices regarding communication. A significant relationship has been found between argumentativeness and self-perceptions of communication competence (Richmond, McCroskey, & McCroskey, 1989). Richmond, McCroskey and McCroskey (1989) suggest that altering a individual's predispositional orientation toward communication (i.e., argumentativeness, communication apprehension, willingness to communicate) may be an effective prerequisite to communication pedagogy that only emphasizes skills training.

Along those lines, recent efforts have been proposed to enhance both an individual's motivation and skill in argumentative communication. Kosberg and Rancer (1989) reviewed several pedagogical methods which appear to result in enhanced motivation and skill in argumentative communication. These methods may indeed promote enhanced skill in argumentative communication, and thus may reduce verbal aggressiveness (Infante, 1988). While longitudinal skills training in arguing is not always possible whether conducted inside or outside of the traditional classroom. Programmatic approaches aimed at positively influencing an individual's cognitive or predispositional orientation to argumentative communication may be a valuable or preferred first course of action in enhancing one's communication competence. Data does not yet exist which compares the superiority of a behavioral, cognitive/predispositional, or mixed method approach to training in informal argument. Nevertheless, enhancing an individual's ability to argue constructively by influencing a person's

motivation to argue (the cognitive and/or behavioral approach) or direct skills training in argumentation (the behavioral approach) is an expressed goal of communication education.

Rancer, Baukus and Infante (1985) identified several underlying belief structures associated with argumentative communication. In their study, participants were asked to elicit beliefs they have about arguing and argumentative communication. Content analytic procedures were used to classify the beliefs into a set of categories identified as beliefs about arguing. Eight belief structures emerged: hostility, activity/process, control/dominance, conflict/dissonance, self-image, learning, skill, and situational. Seven of the belief structures have a positive and negative valence. With the exception of the situational belief category, individuals can express a positive or negative belief about arguing under belief structure.

Individuals who vary in ARGgt were also found to differ in the valence of their belief about arguing. In testing the belief structures about arguing, Rancer, Baukus and Infante (1985) found that high argumentatives have predominantly positive beliefs about arguing, while low argumentatives have predominantly negative beliefs about arguing.

As stated, great deal of research has been produced exploring the two communication predispositions of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Two recent research directions have emerged which have extended the scope of the predispositions. Recent research on argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness has examined the influence of these two

predispositions on marital/interspousal violence and cross cultural communication. The theoretical advancement of argumentativeness and verbal aggression into these areas has stimulated much interest not only in the scholarly community but in the applied arena as well. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the relevant research regarding argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in those two contexts.

THE ROLE OF ARGUMENTATIVENESS AND VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS IN INTRAFAMILY VIOLENCE

A great deal of scholarly and media attention has recently been focused on the nature of aggressive and violent relationships. Violent behavior between spouses has received much attention from scholars outside the communication discipline (Gelles, 1974, 1980; Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1980). Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz (1980) suggest that between one third and one fourth of American families suffer from domestic violence. More recently, scholars have started to explore interspousal violence from an interpersonal communication orientation (e.g., Chandler, 1985, 1988; Chandler, Geist, & Norton, 1983; deTurck, 1987; Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989; Sabourin, Infante, Rudd, & Payne, 1989; Whitchurch, 1987, 1988).

A number of theories have been advanced which try to explain and/or predict intrafamily violence and aggression. Gelles and Straus (1979) identify two intraindividual theories, seven social psychological theories, and six sociocultural theories that have been posited to explain intrafamily violence. The concept of

aggression and aggressiveness is present in several of these theories, as it is an inherent part of domestic violence itself.

Infante (1988, 1987) has suggested an interactionist model of intrafamily violence. This model suggests that the interaction of personal, situational and societal conditions may lead to physically aggressive behavior. More specifically, the model suggests that individuals who suffer from an argumentative skill deficiency may be prone to verbally aggressive behavior. In the context of intimate interaction, this argumentative skill deficiency may lead to greater verbal aggression, and hence, physical aggression and interspousal violence. According to the model, spousal abuse is culminated by physical aggression which is often preceded by verbal aggression. As one explanation for verbal aggression is lack of skill in argument, an argumentative skill deficiency may contribute to interspousal violence. It is important to note, however, that the danger of physical aggression as a result of verbal aggression is present especially "when at least one spouse has a latent hostile disposition because of undissipated anger from societal, personal, and situational sources" (Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989, p. 167).

An element central to the relationship between verbal aggression and physical violence between spouses is the norm of reciprocity (Infante, 1988; Sabourin, Infante, Rudd, & Payne, 1989). This norm of reciprocity suggests that "each act of verbal aggression contributes, with escalating intensity, to a level of negative arousal and a pattern of destructive interaction" (Sabourin, Infante, Rudd, & Payne, 1989, p. 3). If

only one spouse lacks argumentative skill the reciprocity is less likely to occur. If both spouses exhibit motivation and skill in argumentative communication, interspousal violence should be even less likely to occur (Infante, 1988; Sabourin, Infante, Rudd, & Payne, 1989).

In the first test of the assumptions of the argumentative skill deficiency model of interspousal violence, Infante, Chandler and Rudd (1989) tested the hypothesis that: Husbands and wives in violent marriages will be less argumentative and more verbally aggressive than husbands and wives in nonviolent marriages. Four groups of married persons participated in the study. Each represented one of the spouses, husband or wife, in a violent or nonviolent marriage (no couples were used in this study). The study focused on clinically defined abused wives and abusive husbands. Each participant rated himself or herself in terms of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness (using modified versions of the Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggressiveness Scales) and rated his or her spouse on those variables. The data obtained strongly supported the hypothesis that husbands and wives involved in violent marriages would be lower in self-reported argumentativeness and higher in verbal aggressiveness than husbands and wives in self-reported nonviolent marriages. One implication of this study is that couples experiencing intrafamily violence are less motivated and able to talk through controversial issues. Another implication the authors suggest is that if continued research produces a treatment model for interspousal violence, "the communication discipline would be central in terms of delivery since it has

specialized since antiquity in teaching the principles of skillful and constructive argument" (Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989, p. 175).

In an extension of previous research, Sabourin, Infante, Rudd, & Payne (1989) used data obtained from couples to test the relationship between argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, and marital satisfaction. They argue that previous research which relied on the accounts of only one spouse are limited in generalizability.

Three constraints are suggested when using data from only one spouse in an abusive relationship: 1. The individual spouse may distort what is reported in order to portray the other as responsible for the physical violence; 2. Examining one spouse does not permit determining whether both spouses' accounts of a dispute correspond; 3. Data from both spouses is needed in order to determine whether violent marriages differ from others in the relationships between self and spouse perceptions of communicative behavior related to violence (Sabourin, Infante, Rudd & Payne, p. 8).

The results of their study indicate that verbal aggression was reciprocal among spouses, regardless of spousal type (violent couples, distressed/not violent, nonviolent/nondistressed). The study did not find a significant relationship between dissimilarity in argumentativeness and marital satisfaction. The negative relationship between verbal aggression and marital satisfaction demonstrates its damaging effect on both spouses in a relationship. The authors speculate that when a spouse engages

in verbal aggression, he or she may feel low self-esteem and engage in violence to relieve tension (Sabourin, Infante, Rudd, & Payne, 1989). The study also found a high correspondence between spouses perceptions of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Husbands' self-reports of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness corresponded with their wives' perceptions, and wives' self-reports corresponded with their husbands perceptions.

This line of inquiry is beginning to emerge. Communication scholars, working in tandem with psychologists, social workers, family therapists and other counseling professionals, may help shed additional light on this grave societal problem.

ARGUMENTATIVENESS, VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS AND CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The cross-cultural context has emerged as a critical area for communication research. The communication discipline has witnessed tremendous growth in cross-cultural research over the last decade. One reason for this expansion in interest and scholarship is changes taking place in the international environment. More U.S. companies are conducting business in international markets, greater cooperation exists between countries, more organizations are becoming multinational. Growth in international travel has also stimulated much interest in cross-cultural communication. Indeed, we may be witnessing the prophecy of McLuhan's "global village."

The increasing frequency of intercultural interaction has led to a flurry of research in cross-cultural communication. Several theoretical advances have been made especially in the areas of intercultural conflict. On an applied area, the results of this research have been used to train business, governmental and military executives who conduct their activities in cross-cultural settings.

Cultural and communication are bound together. In cross-cultural interaction, differences in behaviors between cultures can stimulate misunderstanding. Linguistic, interactional, behavioral and normative differences between cultures can lead to perceived or actual conflict.

Studies have explored the influence of culture on conflict styles (Kagan, Knight, & Martinez-Romeo, 1982; Wolfson & Norden, 1984; Nomura & Barnlund, 1983; Kumagai & Straus, 1983; Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Ma, 1990). Given the influence of culture on communication behaviors and perceptions, it appears worthwhile to focus on conflict predispositions as they influence cross-cultural communication.

The predispositions of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness may be productively applied to the study of cross-cultural communication and conflict. Examining the two constructs across cultures may help illuminate and clarify differences in conflict styles across cultures. Predispositions have been found to influence actual communication behavior (McCroskey & Daly, 1987; Infante, 1987). Differences in predispositions may contribute to perceived or actual cross-cultural conflict. Thus, it is important to understand

differences in these predispositions and behaviors across cultures in order to prevent conflicts from occurring due to misperceptions and actual behavioral differences.

Cultural distinctions between the U.S. and Japanese cultures have been examined. Barnlund (1975) studied Japanese and American communicative styles, and suggests "In short, the differences are so sharp across a wide set of attributes that it is hard to avoid the conclusion that these cultures are nearly exact opposites" (p. 55). Okabe (1983) points out differences in attitudes toward verbal communication between the two cultures. He describes America as a "communication-active society," marked by eloquent and persuasive exchanges of ideas, while Japanese are called a "communication-passive society," marked by modesty, humility, and suppression of self.

Reischauer (1977) suggests that the Japanese avoid open confrontation. Barnlund (1975) suggests strong differences between Americans and Japanese in attitudes toward argument. He suggests that for Americans interaction frequently becomes an arena for confrontation, "Ideas are its subject matter. Argument is its means" (Barnlund, 1975, p. 130). On the other hand, Japanese attitudes are marked by binding people together, social harmony, and the reinforcement of emotional ties. He suggests, "Differences of opinion, and particularly arguments, since they disrupt the atmosphere and divide the group, arouse apprehension (Barnlund, 1975, p. 129). Becker (1986) examined attitudes of Chinese and Japanese toward communication. He contends that members of those cultures tend to avoid confrontation, "In

Chinese and Japanese eyes, taking opposite sides of an argument necessarily meant becoming a personal rival and antagonist of the one who held the other side" (Becker, 1986, p. 78). Ma (1990) describing characteristics of Chinese communication behaviors states "Chinese emphasize social harmony, foregoing direct expression of feelings and disdaining any suggestion of verbal aggression" (p. 305).

The paucity of empirical data from intercultural communication research suggests that it would be profitable to explore potential cultural differences in argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Recently, Suzuki and Rancer (1990) investigated whether the Japanese differ from Americans in argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Japanese college students (n=716) completed the Argumentativeness Scale, the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale, ten scales measuring the likelihood of using a variety of compliance-gaining strategies, and three semantic-differential scales for measuring attitudes toward arguing. All scales were in presented in Japanese. To ensure equivalence in the measurement of the two constructs, the original versions of the Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggressiveness Scale were translated into Japanese, then back translated into English by another professional translator. The Japanese data was compared with a sample of data from American college students (n=755) who also completed both measures.

The findings indicated that the American sample differed from the Japanese sample on both argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. The American sample was significantly higher than the Japanese sample on both aggressive communication

predispositions. In addition, Japanese males were found to be significantly higher than Japanese females in argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. The Japanese were also significantly less likely to use verbal aggression as a compliance-gaining strategy than other compliance-gaining strategies.

These findings provide seminal data on the influence of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in Japanese culture. The study extended the generalizability of the Argumentativeness Scale and model, and the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale and model. The findings provide some additional insights regarding cultural differences in those two aggressive communication predispositions. Realizing the differences in these predispositional forces enhances our understanding of how the two cultures may approach and handle social conflict.

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